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ABSTRACT

A study attempted to develop an organizational communication competence scale that focuses on both communication skills as well as appropriate role behavior within an organizational communication context. A 30-item scale, later reduced to 12 items, was administered to 245 undergraduate students enrolled in a basic speech course. Responses were factor analyzed. Results indicated that conceptualizing organizational communication competence as consisting of effective business communication skills and appropriate role behavior is viable. Findings suggest that if managers wish to be perceived as competent, they cannot focus solely upon task-related communication, but also must be able to communicate in a manner that is appropriate given their particular role within the organization. (Contains 30 references and 2 tables of data. The 30-item scale and the 12-item scale are attached.) (RS)

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Development of an Organizational Communication Competence Instrument

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Abstract

The following study is an attempt to develop an organizational communication competence scale that focuses on both communication skills as well as appropriate role behavior within an organizational communication context. Through the course of this investigation, a 30-item scale has been reduced to 12 items. Eight of these items examine the appropriateness of a supervisor's behavior while 4 of the items examine the skill level of the supervisor.

Development of an Organizational Communication Competence Instrument

Research investigating the factors that influence interpersonal communication competence increased dramatically during the 1970s and the 1980s by examining levels of competence, influences that competence can have upon one's functioning in society, and how competence can influence perception of self and others (Rubi 1990). One area of communication competence that has received little research attention has been organizational communication competence.

Although the communication competence construct has been of interest to organizational researchers and practitioners, there has been sparse theoretical development or empirical testing of the construct (Jablin, Cude, Wayson, House, Lee, & Roth, 1989). The studies that have been conducted have focused on the communication skills necessary to be perceived as competent (Clark, Wood, Kuehnel, Flanagan, Mosk, & Northrup, 1985; DiSalvo & Larsen, 1987; Disalvo, Larsen, & Seiler, 1976; Downs & Conrad, 1982; Monge, Bachman, Dillard, & Eisenberg, 1982; Morse & Piland, 1981; Rader & Wunsch, 1980; Wellmon, 1988), or the identification of competence deficiency (Bennett & Onley, 1986; Berryman-Fink, 1985; Meister & Reinsch, 1978; Staley & Shockley-Zalabak, 1986).

There have been several instruments that have been developed to measure organizational communication competence (Monge, Bachman, Dillard, & Eisenberg, 1982; Staley & Shockley-Zalabak, 1986). These instruments, however, have focused upon broadly

defined encoding and decoding communication skills. The present study was an attempt to develop an organizational communication competence measure that is based upon both effective business communication skills and appropriate role behavior. A brief literature review, the steps taken in the development of the instrument, the results of statistical tests, and the implications for future research will be discussed.

Literature Review

Organizational communication competence research can be divided into skills research, rules research, and scale development. The following sections will detail each of these areas.

Skills

The bulk of research that has examined organizational communication competence has focused upon determining the skills critical for an individual to be perceived as a competent communicator. A typical skills study asked participants to either rank and rate the importance of various lists of communication skills the researchers perceived as necessary for success, to identify areas of skill deficiency that lead to being perceived as incompetent, or to identify the skills of those whom they felt were effective (Jablin et al., 1989).

One study that followed this format was the DiSalvo, Larsen, and Seiler (1976) study which attempted to determine the skills that recent college graduates perceived as critical for success

for persons in business organizations. The respondents indicated the five most important communication skills necessary for effectiveness in one's job were advising, listening, persuading, instructing, and routine information exchange. The skills perceived as influential in future success were listening, persuading, advising, instructing, and small group problem solving. The skills that were perceived as critical were not significantly different as a result of the direction or channel of communication, as advising, listening, and routine information exchange consistently were ranked among the most important organizational communication skills. Other authors (Goodall, 1982; Muchmore & Galvin, 1983; Staley & Shockley-Zalabak, 1985) have found the skills that were perceived as critical were speaking skills, listening skills, and human relations skills, all of which basically are consonant with the Disalvo et al. (1976) findings.

Rules

A second approach to the study of organizational communication competence has utilized the rules perspective. Kelly's (1955) rules-based model was adopted by Harris and Cronen (1979) and Wellmon (1988) to aid in determining the factors that influence perceptions of organizational communication competence. Harris and Cronen (1979) conclude that an individual's organizational communication competence is influenced by constitutive rules, regulative rules, and what Cushman and Pearce (1977) have termed master contracts.

First, constitutive rules function to organize meanings in light of the organizational image, demonstrating how certain actions, beliefs, or concepts "count" by interpreting the constructs that define the collectivity (Harris & Cronen, 1979). By acquiring an understanding of constitutive rules, organization members can determine which behaviors are appropriate and which behaviors are perceived as not being consonant with the organizational image. Individuals who communicate by following the constitutive rules will be perceived as more communicatively competent. Conversely, those who break the rules will be considered less competent.

Second, regulative rules are developed by the organization members and guide their actions and coordinate activity to accomplish ends that require conjoint activity (Harris & Cronen, 1979). In order to construct organizational regulative rules, members must engage in roletaking and reconstruct how speech acts influence the behavior of other organization members (Jablin et al., 1989). Regulative rules require an understanding of constitutive rules as well as an understanding of the person with whom the individual is communicating in order for the behavior to be deemed "appropriate" for the outcome. Again, those who behave in a manner that is consonant with the regulative rules established will be considered a more competent communicator, while those who violate the regulative rules will be considered less competent.

Third, master contracts specify goals and the means of achieving those goals (Cushman & Pearce, 1977). The master contract "expresses a consensus on goals that are legitimate for affirmation of the organizational self-identity" (Harris & Cronen, 1979, p. 18). Individuals understand and follow rules usually as a result of their understanding of the master contract. Likewise, workers violate rules in accordance with their understanding of the master contract (Wellmon, 1988). Therefore, organization members who understand the master contract and follow organization rules are perceived as more competent communicators.

Scale Development

A third area that has surfaced in organizational communication competence research has been scale development. Although there have been some scales developed that hint at organizational communication competence, the scale cited most frequently in organizational communication literature was developed by Monge, Bachman, Dillard, and Eisenberg (1982). Monge et al. (1982) argue that the organizational communication competence construct should focus on observable communication behaviors and omit or minimize social and interpersonal factors. From their review of communication competence literature (surveying such authors Berlo, 1960, Farace, Stewart, & Taylor, 1978, Miller 1977, Norton, 1978, Norton & Miller, 1975, and Wiemann, 1977), a two dimensional correlated structure of encoding and decoding ability was developed.

Monge et al. (1982) tested the model and found strong support for the two factor model, with an internal reliability of .85 for both supervisors and subordinates. The authors believe that the support for the two factor model was the result of a narrower notion of communicator competence, incorporating the context into the survey, and hypothesizing a more parsimonious model with only two correlated factors.

Although communication competence research has increased dramatically, organizational communication competence has received little research attention. The Monge et al. (1982) scale focuses solely on encoding and decoding communication skills. In examining the literature, one is led to conclude that organizational communication competence encompasses more than simply encoding and decoding skills. As a result, the present study hypothesizes that organizational communication competence is a combination of effective business communication skills and appropriate role behavior, and proposes a scale that will broaden the scope of organizational communication competence.

Method

Participants

Responses were gathered from 245 undergraduate students enrolled in a basic speech course. Participation in the study fulfilled a research requirement. There were 142 females and 102 males (1 respondent did not report gender). The mean age of the participants was 20.143. There were 35 respondents in managerial

positions and 202 respondents in nonmanagement positions (8 respondents did not report their position). Finally, the respondents were asked to indicate the gender of their supervisor. 137 of the supervisors were male while 99 were female (9 did not indicate the gender of their supervisor).

Item Generation

Items were generated by surveying the organizational communication competence literature cited earlier, surveying general interpersonal communication competence literature, and interviewing employees of various organizations (academe, real estate, academic administration, and fast food). The people interviewed had differing levels of experience, as well as different position-types (a total of 6 people were interviewed). From these interviews, an original list of 52 items was generated. The list was narrowed to 30 items because some of the items were redundant or lacked a communication focus.

Scale

The scale developed by Monge et al. (1982) focused solely upon the communication skills of encoding and decoding, and did not include interpersonal communication factors as perceptual influences of organizational communication competence. Various authors (Goldhaber, 1986; Mintzberg, 1973) have argued that organization members have social as well as task communication needs. Thus, the present scale has included in its design

appropriate communication behaviors as well as effective business communication skills.

The items were developed to measure the respondent's perceptions of his/her superior's ability to enact appropriate roles, as well as measure the respondent's perceptions of his/her superior's ability to communicate in an effective manner. Of the original 30 scale items, 22 focused on appropriate role behavior and eight examined communication skill effectiveness. The participants were asked to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement on a five point Likert-type scale for each item. Each item was prefaced with the phrase, "My supervisor...." Items 1, 4, 6, 8, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19, 23, 17, 19, and 30 were negatively worded (to avoid response set), and thus were reverse scored.

Results

The mean for the scale was 28.52, with a median of 28.00, and a standard deviation of 7.31. Comparison of the observed distribution of scores with the normal distribution was conducted by employing the Kolmogorov-Smirnov goodness of fit test. The difference between the two distributions was not significant ($p > .20$), indicating a normal distribution.

The responses to the 30 items designed to measure organizational communication competence were then factor analyzed with a principle components analysis, followed by a Varimax rotation. A scree test was employed and two significant factors

were extracted for rotation. The results of the rotation can be found in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Coefficient alpha also was computed for the thirty-item scale and was .93. Also, upper and bottom quartile t-tests were conducted on each item to determine if there was a significant difference between respondents who scored highly on the items and those who scored lower on the items. All thirty items were significant ($p < .001$).

After the factors were rotated, a 50/30 criteria was employed to determine which items would be retained. As can be seen in the table, eight items that loaded on the first factor met the 50/30 criteria, and five items that loaded on the second factor met the 50/30 criteria. A purity test was conducted on those factors that met the 50/30 criteria. Examination of the results from the purity test indicated that one additional item (number 22) should be dropped from the analysis because it loaded highly on both factors. The results of the purity test can be found in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Coefficient alpha was computed for the 12 item scale (.86), as well as for the eight items that made up factor 1 (.86) and the four items that made up factor 2 (.76). The stability of the instrument was tested by a one-week test-retest of the scale to a

different sample of 49 students enrolled in a communication course. The issue of stability is important because it is assumed that organizational communication competence is a stable trait (although there will be some variation). Thus, an instrument measuring the trait should reflect the stability. The results supported this assumption. The first administration was highly correlated with the second (r = .90, p < .01).

As was consistent with the original conceptualization, it appears that the first factor measures appropriate business communication behaviors, and the second factor measures the ability of the supervisor to effectively communicate day-to-day information critical for organizational success. A copy of the original survey can be found in Appendix A, and a copy of the 12-item scale can be found in Appendix B.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if organizational communication competence should be conceptualized as consisting of effective business communication skills and appropriate role behavior. The results gathered from this investigation indicate that conceptualizing organizational communication competence as such is viable. The items extracted from the analysis that make up factor one ("intimidates members of my unit," "relates well to everyone," "does not treat others with respect," "is well liked," "creates a comfortable atmosphere," "encourages an open exchange of ideas," "does not trust members of my unit," and "yells at

people when they perform poorly") were initially conceptualized as appropriate business communication behaviors, and the results of the analysis support this conceptualization. All of the above factors contain behaviors that either are or are not appropriate to an organizational context, and focus on the level of professionalism of the supervisor. Thus, this study posits that one factor that influences perceptions of organizational communication competence is appropriate interpersonal communication behaviors, and these behaviors are linked to social aspects of organizational functioning.

The second factor was conceptualized as the ability of the supervisor to effectively communicate information about organizational operations. The items extracted from the analysis that make up the second factor ("gives clear instructions," "effectively conveys routine information," "is knowledgeable about daily operations," and "demonstrates concern about organizational success") all either are related to information exchange or are concerned with communicating methods of effective organizational administration. Thus, this study posits that employee perceptions of their supervisor's organizational communication competence also is influenced by his/her ability to effectively communicate information about organizational, departmental, or personal goals.

In sum, these results indicate that perceptions of organizational communication competence are influenced by both appropriate business communication behaviors (focusing more on

social aspects) and effective communication skills (focusing more on information exchange critical to day-to-day functioning). The implications of these findings for managers focuses on the need to recognize that perceptions of organizational communication competence involve both social and task dimensions of communication. If managers wish to be perceived as competent, they cannot focus solely upon task-related communication (as has been implied in some earlier organizational communication competence literature, e.g. Clark, Wood, Kuehnel, Flanagan, Mosk, & Northrup, 1985; DiSalvo & Larsen, 1987; Disalvo, Larsen, & Seiler, 1976; Rader & Wunsch, 1980; Wellmon, 1988), but also must be able to communicate in a manner that is appropriate given their particular role within the organization.

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Table 1

Initial Rotated Factor Loadings for the Organizational Communication Competence Measure

	Factor 1	Factor 2
OCC26	.76191	.17838
OCC24	.76007	.21482
OCC25	.73398	.27785
OCC20	.71431	.29596
OCC23	.64616	.28488
OCC29	.63000	.16345
OCC22	.58805	.30002
OCC28	.56900	.35018
OCC27	.54850	.35001
OCC30	.54074	-.05794
OCC08	.51602	.13686
OCC15	.48572	.24850
OCC19	.48446	.30344
OCC05	.46443	.43954
OCC21	.45565	.19985
OCC12	.40268	.14935
OCC03	.04074	.80987
OCC02	.13963	.75211
OCC11	.18897	.65064
OCC09	.49431	.55700
OCC16	.47487	.55681
OCC07	.41546	.53237
OCC14	.02764	.52580
OCC06	.29036	.51737
OCC10	.42515	.49944
OCC01	.27687	.48192
OCC04	.14341	.45388
OCC18	.24267	.43923
OCC13	.38062	.41778
OCC17	.25866	.37015

Table 2

Purity Test Factor Loadings for the Organizational Communication Competence Measure

	Factor 1	Factor 2
OCC25	.77688	.26646
OCC26	.77641	.20568
OCC24	.77195	.20893
OCC20	.73420	.26559
OCC29	.67694	.16655
OCC23	.64957	.30121
OCC30	.56971	-.01926
OCC08	.54431	.03429
OCC03	.06763	.85645
OCC02	.17080	.79949
OCC11	.21586	.69926
OCC14	.06278	.54061
OCC06	.32800	.52721

Appendix A

Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Neutral 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5

My supervisor ...

1.	says the wrong thing at the wrong time.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	gives clear instructions.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	effectively conveys routine information.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	writes in a manner that is difficult to understand.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	is an attentive listener.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	shows a lack of concern for people in my unit.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	is dedicated to the people in my unit.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	intimidates members of my unit.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	is sensitive to the needs of others.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	shows sympathy to others.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	is knowledgeable about daily operations.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	is more concerned about productivity than ethics.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	has an unprofessional attitude.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	demonstrates concern about organizational success.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	gives workers insufficient feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	provides workers with good advice.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	does not have much confidence.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	represents the company well to the public.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	does not have a sense of humor.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	relates well to everyone.	1	2	3	4	5

Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Neutral 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5

My supervisor ...

21.	is able to get me to work even when I don't feel like it.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	leads by example.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	does not treat others with respect.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	is well liked.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	creates a comfortable atmosphere.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	encourages an open exchange of ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	is too critical of people in my unit.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	gives credit where credit is due.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	does not trust members of my unit.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	yells at people when they perform poorly.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B

Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Neutral 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5

My supervisor ...

1.	gives clear instructions.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	effectively conveys routine information.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	intimidates members of my unit.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	is knowledgeable about daily operations.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	demonstrates concern about organizational success.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	relates well to everyone.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	does not treat others with respect.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	is well liked.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	creates a comfortable atmosphere.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	encourages an open exchange of ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	does not trust members of my unit.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	yells at people when they perform poorly.	1	2	3	4	5